

Making a reconnection

The distance between Kolkata and Khulna is only about 170-odd kilometres. That's nearly 1,000 kilometres less than what you would travel to reach Delhi from Howrah, for instance. But such is the logic of nations and history, and the power of borders, that one figure has seemed far more momentous for the people of the two Bengals. Thus, a new weekly train between the two cities inaugurated on Thursday by the prime ministers of India and Bangladesh and the chief minister of West Bengal, is a welcome move. Now you can board the Bandhan Express in the morning in Kolkata and reach Khulna in a little over five hours — one small journey in freeing geography from the clutches of history.

A rail connection between Khulna, an industrial city, and the West Bengal capital resumes after a break of 52 years. An earlier service, the Barisal Express, was cancelled during the 1965 India-Pakistan war, when Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan. In that respect, too, this is a long-overdue attempt to bring the two countries closer. Happily, India's relationship with Bangladesh has been on an upswing since Sheikh Hasina's landmark visit in 2010. On security issues, especially, our neighbour has been greatly sensitive to our concerns — even though the Teesta water-sharing remains unresolved.

That such bigger hurdles are not standing in the way of the flow of people, ideas and cultures between the countries is a sign of maturity — something sorely missing on India's north-western borders. As a dominant power in the subcontinent, India has often been seen as the big brother who cuts a hard bargain. It can allay such suspicions if it goes by that old motto: Only connect. At a time when borders across the world seem more like implacable walls, we need more, not less, international road, rail and water routes. India can take the lead. The Bandhan Express is a good train to take for that journey.

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